

Response to National History Curriculum Framing Paper: SEAA

Preamble

The idea of allocating History to be the vehicle for social science and humanities education appear to our members to be problematic in that interdisciplinary study in areas such as Values Education, Global Education, Human Rights Education, Environmental Education, civics and Citizenship Education and Intercultural Education appears to be disregarded in this approach. There is a danger for many very important perspectives to be left out of national curriculum planning. Establishing a curriculum that is perhaps called social education or social sciences and humanities would better enable these interdisciplinary approaches to be embraced. There continues to be scope in social education to encapsulate both disciplinary and interdisciplinary perspectives.

The principles and specifications for development of the national curriculum in fact indicates that 'it should provide students with an understanding of the past that has shaped the society and culture in which they are growing and developing and with knowledge, understanding and skills that will help them in their future lives'. It is difficult to see teachers of History carrying this load for the entire social sciences and humanities. This seems to have a vision of history as a vehicle for understanding the present and future, which of course it can provide perspective upon, but surely it cannot do all that is necessary for present day students to learn to live in our current global communities.

Introduction

We agree that a study of national history is essential component of school education. Many of our members are historians. However we do not necessarily agree that history should be seen as an explanatory model to test hypotheses and so on (point 15). This seems to be pushing the study of history in a direction which discounts its strength in providing multiple narratives, and also providing insight in areas that perhaps are not presently seen as imperatives but may become so in the future. The choice of what topics to study and what skills and values to be explored is crucial. To only study areas which are currently seen as important limits historical study to be the handmaiden of political vagaries.

History is an important study but so is Geography, Environmental Education, Human Rights Education, Intercultural Education and so on. All are important to develop functioning Australian citizens who know their past but can also be active in developing their future.

Aims

Disagree

It aims to do too much. The future orientation – globalisation, rise of knowledge economy, diversity, position in the Asia Pacific region, and we would add environmental crises – would lead us to wonder why history can be chosen to teach all of this. History is about the past – it has enough to deal with in the past without trying to figure out knowledge and skills that will be of value to the future.

Teaching about all the major civilisations – Europe, Asia, Africa, America and Australia would seem to require a very broad approach – is that necessary? What is

the purpose of this? Is it to teach about democracy? Is it to teach about cooperation? Is it to assess approaches to indigenous/colonial disputes? Is it to teach about how the world is linked together economically and environmentally? Is it to practice our scientific thinking skills? Some areas, regions of the world or periods of history may not be as directly relevant to Australia's past as others. Should we still teach it? How do we decide and who decides? Are there values that we are trying to illustrate? Is the study of history the way to do so or are there other ways to tackle these in a school setting?

Terms used in this paper

Agree

These three approaches overview, bridging and study in depth seem to be appropriate seeing there is so much to cover. It is of concern that the examples used for bridging and study in depth are all associated with political history with war studies to be of particular focus. Are there alternate ways of seeing history eg. Environmental history, womens' history, science history, history of human rights, history of indigenous movements?

Considerations

Futures

Agree

Putting Australian history in a global context is very important. Leaving enough room in the curriculum after teaching all of these things to ensure all aspects of civics and citizenship education, for example, is important too. Futures studies can be enabled in multiple ways including by the study of history.

Historical understanding

Agree

There are multiple ways of listing historical understandings. These are useful.

Cross curriculum implications

Strongly disagree

As pointed out in the document the big danger is that cross curriculum connections will be forced on history and skew the attention away from the study of history understandings which should be made explicit. We agree with this. Forcing a whole raft of curriculum perspectives into the study of history is counter productive and not necessary. There are some skills and knowledge that are better taught in isolation or incorporated into other discipline or interdisciplinary areas. Room should be made in the curriculum for these things (from our perspective very important areas of social Education) to be addressed. If there is a decision for the study of history to take on board a large group of cross curriculum initiatives there will be little room for them to be catered for in the other time left for teaching. We already have a very crowded

curriculum – let us teach aspects of the curriculum in the manner that it is most productive to teach it- not try to force it into history.

Structure of the Curriculum

Agree

Careful curriculum design needs to account for both substantive and procedural knowledge whereas the concepts of overview, bridging and study in depth seems to only relate to substantive knowledge. Surely substantive knowledge can be used to teach particular concepts (still enabling some chronological foundations) allowing more teacher choice. Procedural knowledge would then seem to be the area that requires some sequencing.

Complaints of repetition from Australian students usually lies around the notion that what is taught in primary school is then retaught in secondary school. This is an issue that leads us to ensure that we have well trained primary school teachers, and that there be recognition by secondary teachers of what primary teachers do in the social education areas. It is essentially a professional development issue and no amount of curriculum structuring will change classroom practice without resources being provided to both sectors.

Stage 1

Agree

We agree that students at Stage 1 have varied family backgrounds as well as the capacity to access technology so that their views of the world are not totally affected by their knowledge of their local place. Thus grounding the curriculum at this stage on direct experience is a useful tool to develop historical understanding. Students at this Stage however learn better when aspects of their lives are integrated so it is important that all aspects of the curriculum work together and that history not be a box of learning separated from others. Learning all the different measurements of historical time for example may not be something that emerges from this integrated curriculum easily. Developing a basic appreciation of how and why people in the past acted in the way they did is also problematic. At this age empathy is a difficult skill to develop and is very influenced by perspectives of the present. The use of fiction is an excellent approach to take in this stage.

Stage 2

Disagree

There appears to be a lot to cover. Before the history curriculum is developed there needs to be some indication of how much time is going to be allocated in the already overcrowded primary curriculum to cater for the areas that the document points out also needs to be covered- ie social studies, environmental studies, civics (and we can add a number of other studies- see above) . Much of the subject matter will be revisited in secondary school – it is difficult for example to cover early settler lives in the local region without saying why they arrived and some understanding of contact history. Federation is a topic that is often seen as repeated, and students and teachers seem to uniformly dislike it, yet this curriculum seems to once again emphasise that it be taught in both areas of schooling. Is there a reason why the primary history

curriculum seems to follow a thematic /conceptual approach yet the secondary does not ?

Stage 3

Disagree

Lack of emphasis on social understanding. Lots of content to cover. The pedagogy of history seems to be lost in all this. Is this a story of the growth and progress of our glorious Australian nation? Is it about democracy? Is it about a fair go for all? The values decide the content and the pedagogy and this needs to be explicit? What is left out? Environmental education for a start. Civics education to a certain degree, as well as active citizenship.

Stage 4

Agree

This area of the curriculum allows scope for contextual differences in approach, thus allowing for state, regional and individual teacher professionalism. This is a useful approach.

Other comments

Professional development is crucial. There is no substitute for well trained teachers and this means teachers who know their content but also how to teach it well, taking into consideration their particular teaching context. It would seem that a loose framework for development of history understandings with well resourced materials and lots of time for teachers to reflect on their teaching with their colleagues would really improve history teaching, and for that matter all teaching.